

Part IV:

Questions & Comments From/About Fire

(Heard at the 2009 IM Outreach Meetings)

In their 40-plus meetings around Montana, members of the IM outreach team heard hundreds of comments from county government leaders and potential users of the IM system. Here are some of the comments that related directly to the fire services community:

Gallatin County fire services see no need for IM. (Bozeman)

Current mutual aid works very well and we can prove it. (Bozeman)

The needs of fire services and law enforcement are different. Fire may have issues with the IM system, but law enforcement would use the system more. (Bozeman)

How does this improve what we already have for fire? We don't see any advantage. (Hamilton)

Information on the specifics of IM isn't getting to our local level in the fire services. (Missoula)

Is this system more for supervisors instead of tactical people, especially in the fire services? (Missoula)

Each fire district has equipment that works. We don't want to screw that up. (Missoula)

Fire departments have little use for it, except for mutual aid. We can't afford expensive radio systems. Fire and EMS won't come on until we have money for new radios. (Kalispell)

Fire departments will get better coverage and might want to embrace it (Kalispell)

As a fire chief, I can't talk across the fence to the town departments in Malta or Harlem. We also have an issue with the county, since our radios are digital and theirs are analog. It feels like we've actually gone backwards with new digital radios. (Fort Belknap)

We want to communicate with feds on fires— inability to talk to a retardant pilot put our people in danger during an incident. (Glendive)

Fire departments must have access to money for radio purchases. But they don't have money and many do not have taxing authority. (Lewistown)

We have big issues with Canada when it comes to fires along the border. We used trunking (in test mode) to follow a fire across the border. But each province has different communications technology. Alberta is advanced; Saskatchewan is not. (Havre)

We've seen the Fred Cady and Cascade Fire Council letters. Have you answered them? (Wolf Point)

Everybody in the fire community wants another tool in their box, whether it's a hammer or communications. (Wolf Point)

Dave Mason (of the Fire Services Training School) likes the IM system. (Wolf Point)

In West Yellowstone, we can use the Idaho interoperable system to talk to EMS ambulance or rescue helicopter all the way to the hospital in Idaho Falls. It works very well. (Fire Chiefs Conference)

Our fire district extends ten miles into N. Dakota. They have our channels on their radios and can hear us, but they can't talk to us directly, so there's a time lapse in communications. Westby site would help that situation, as well as talking to Canada. (Plentywood)

Teaching 18-year-old or 20-year-old fire fighters to use new radios isn't easy. (Plentywood)

Narrowbanding has worked well at Fish & Wildlife for interagency fire communications. (Plentywood)

It's difficult to ask small jurisdictions like fire and dispatch, which operate on a shoestring, to pay into the system now. (Eureka)

Volunteer fire and ambulance services have no money, so don't put undue stress on them. (Scobey)

Who is the biggest user (of communications)? Fire departments use a lot of resources, as does law enforcement. (Kalispell)